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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SHANGHAI 000407

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SUBJECT: SHANGHAI CATHOLIC BISHOP JIN OPTIMISTIC ON RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM

REF: SHANGHAI 259

CLASSIFIED BY: Beatrice A. Camp, Consul General, U.S. Consulate
General, Shanghai, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: Shanghai Bishop Aloysius Jin (JIN Luxian) told the Consul General that he is generally satisfied with the situation of Catholics in China, favorably contrasting present freedoms against the Mao Zedong era. The 92-year-old Bishop said he was unaware of any bishops presently incarcerated or otherwise detained in China, though one had been briefly arrested during the Beijing Summer Olympics. The Central Government is not confident in its dealings with Christians. Many underground Catholic Bishops have called on Bishop Jin, knowing that his comparatively wealthy Shanghai Diocese can supply funds and Catholic publications. Bishop Jin said his diocese has received important financial support through the years from overseas Protestant as well as Catholic groups. He bemoaned that China's one-child policy and Church celibacy rules have resulted in a declining number of Chinese pursuing religious vocations at his seminary. The Bishop's health is frail, yet he remains mentally acute. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) The Consul General paid an introductory call on Bishop Jin on September 19 to discuss religious freedom issues and Catholicism in China. The Bishop, a native of Shanghai, entered the Jesuit order in 1938 and was ordained in Rome in 1945. He served 27 years (1955-1982) in Chinese prison and labor camps as a "Vatican spy." He became Bishop of Shanghai in 1985. Throughout the September 19 discussion, the Bishop was engaging, sharp in mind but weak in voice, wry in humor, enthusiastic about his contacts with U.S. Consuls General over nearly three decades, and generally optimistic about religious freedom in China. The Bishop, invalidated by a throat infection in the late spring and unable to greet visitors, has been again well enough to make brief public appearances such as at Consulate General farewell and welcome receptions in the last month. He told Congenoffs this summer that he does not expect to see the end of 2009, smilingly saying that his deal with his Creator has been one more year of service for each of his 27 years of imprisonment.

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

13. (SBU) Bishop Jin told the CG he is satisfied with Catholic

Church relations with the Central and Shanghai Municipal Governments. Through the years, former Shanghai Party Secretaries Jiang Zemin and Xi Jinping as well as the former United Front Work Department Minister Liu Yandong had called on him to discuss the Catholic Church in Shanghai and China. Current Politburo member and Shanghai Party Secretary Yu Zhengsheng has also paid a courtesy call on him, and current head of the United Front Work Department Du Linqing, who visits monthly, has become a "good friend." Bishop Jin has not visited Beijing since his heart attack four years ago.

14. (C) The degree to which the Communist Party exerts control over the church changed over time, Bishop Jin said, but, compared to Mao Zedong's era, the church today enjoys "almost all freedoms." Since his release from labor camp in 1982, the Shanghai Diocese has opened 144 churches, three homes for the elderly, and a retirement home for elderly nuns. The diocese operates a seminary and religious library at Sheshan on the west side of Shanghai. The Bishop also established a diocesan publishing house to print and distribute Catholic religious materials such as but not limited to breviaries and prayer books. One freedom not available is to broadcast religious material on radio or television, he noted. Notwithstanding the Chinese Government's policy that China's Patriotic Catholic Church is not permitted any allegiance to the Pope in Rome, the Bishop's patience and persistence over several years finally won permission to include prayers for the Pope in his Chinese language publications as well as to print and distribute other information about the Pope. He counsels patience and hope in pursuing change in China, and expressed hope that his successor may be able to realize his dream of establishing a Catholic university in Shanghai. Jesuit provincials and Silesian and other Catholic orders have already pledged financial and other

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support for such a university when permitted.

THE VATICAN AND THE UNDERGROUND CHURCH

15. (C) Bishop Jin is disappointed that he has been unable to travel to Rome to meet a Pope since his release in 1982. The Communist Party, "like God, knows everything and has agents everywhere," so going to Rome secretly has always been out of the question. Still, during his travels to Europe and North America in the 1980s and 1990s, several Cardinals met with him under the Pope's directive, so he could be said to have met the Pope indirectly. Cardinals have also visited him in China.

16. (C) No Chinese bishops are presently in jail now. One had been detained during the Beijing Olympics but since set free. (Note: Following our September 19 meeting with Bishop Jin, we saw a press report that underground Bishop Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding, Hebei Province, had been taken into custody on August 24 but since released. End note.) A bishop in Shanxi had been detained for six months in 2007, and Bishop Xu in Baoding (Hebei Province) had also been detained, Jin said. Leaders of the underground Catholic Church in China are particularly susceptible to detention due to their activities, which lead to unregistered, non-permitted large assemblies. Many underground bishops have visited Bishop Jin in Shanghai through the years, knowing of his (indirect) relations with the Pope and knowing that Bishop Jin and the Shanghai Diocese can offer financial, material and spiritual help to their congregations. Shanghai provides Catholic publications printed by the Shanghai Diocese's publishing house and collections are taken up at Shanghai Masses for the intention of supporting Catholics elsewhere in China.

HELP FROM OVERSEAS PROTESTANT ORGANIZATIONS

17. (C) Bishop Jin said he and his diocese have several times been the recipients of financial assistance from overseas Protestant groups, for which the Bishop is very grateful. The Presbyterian Church in Scotland provided funding for scholarships for the use of the Shanghai Diocese following

Bishop Jin's earlier visits to Scotland. The United Bible Society purchased the paper for one million copies of the New Testament that were printed in China, some of which went to Catholic churches. A Protestant group in the United States (not further identified) has also provided funding to the Shanghai Diocese. Bishop Jin attributed Protestant assistance to the Catholic Church in Shanghai to recognition of shared evangelical goals and recognition that all Christians are brothers and sisters. In addition to support by Protestant groups, U.S. universities, including Seton Hall and the University of San Francisco, and Jesuit provincials have made important donations of funds and books for the Shanghai Seminary library.

18. (C) The Shanghai Diocese itself also has some income-producing assets, the Bishop further explained. Catholic missions and missionaries had built a number of houses in pre-1949 China. Seized during the early days of the People's Republic, some of these properties have been turned over to the diocese during the last 30 years of China's reform and opening up. The Shanghai Diocese has been luckier than other dioceses in China, in that elsewhere many former church-affiliated properties remain in the hands of government entities. Those properties returned in Shanghai enable the Shanghai Diocese to raise about USD 500 thousand per year in rents that are applied to diocesan expenses and the church's charitable work throughout China.

19. (C) Foreign priests and nuns are resident in China now -- many of them as visiting faculty at Chinese universities -- but cannot openly proselytize at this time. Shanghai and China have their doors open to the world, the Bishop said, but the doors open to democracy and religion are not as far open as the door to inbound investment. The Bishop is confident that China will not -- and cannot -- close these open doors, and that missionaries will be overtly allowed back into China within ten years.

110. (C) The Central Government at present is not confident in its dealings with religious groups, and that lack of confidence is reflected in government suspiciousness about religious

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practice. Government officials are a little afraid of Protestants, Bishop Jin observed, because of the strength and number of Protestant missionary activities through the years, while government officials are afraid of Catholicism due to the central role and power of a single official, the Pope. Although the Church is not permitted to establish parochial schools, the Shanghai Diocese has been able to organize and operate a summer school program to teach the catechism to youth and young adults.

RELIGIOUS VOCATIONS AND THE SHANGHAI CATHOLIC SEMINARY

111. (C) Bishop Jin bemoaned the lack of young persons choosing to pursue religious vocations. The Shanghai Diocese presently has only 74 priests for its 144 churches. Sixty of these priests hail from northwestern China. Of 88 nuns, only ten hail from Shanghai itself, with many of the others coming from Shandong, Shanxi, Shaanxi and Sichuan Provinces, where more often families have more than one child. The Church's celibacy rule for priests and China's one-child policy are the crucial factors in why so few men and their families would countenance entry into the priesthood now. Presently, the Shanghai Seminary at Sheshan has 68 candidates studying for the priesthood, down from more than 100 seminarians just three years ago. The current seminarians hail from more than 20 dioceses throughout China.

112. (C) Despite the grave impact of family planning on Catholic vocations, Bishop Jin said he supports family planning in China. He has encouraged women in his parishes to take birth control pills, while resolutely and always opposing abortion. China cannot afford an explosion in the numbers of children, the Bishop explained. He allowed that his practice and policy on family planning is controversial and has attracted the opprobrium of Bishops elsewhere in the world, especially from

some in the United States.

Bio Note

¶13. (C) Bishop Jin said his late spring 2008 throat infection has damaged his larynx. He is forbidden to talk too much because "I have no elasticity in my vocal cords." Hard of hearing and a little unsteady on his feet, he remains mentally acute, self-deprecating and humorous. He has authored a new pamphlet on St. Paul and the church's Pauline year, copies of which he presented to his September 19 visitors. He appeared weaker at a Consulate reception on September 18 and when visited on September 19 than when he attended a Consulate reception on August 20. Still, he spoke lucidly and at considerable length, albeit quietly, during our September 19 meeting.

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